

This Week in Congress

January 31, 2005

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find it useful.

□ **Assisting Military Families**

This week, I joined efforts in the House to increase benefits for our military men and women who have paid the ultimate sacrifice defending our country. Currently, when a soldier is killed in the line of duty, the family receives \$12,000 as a death benefit, which is often barely enough to cover the funeral expenses. This is inadequate for expressing our nation's gratitude to the soldiers and their families for the price paid in defending our freedom. The legislation that I have sponsored will increase these death benefits for soldiers' families to \$100,000.

One can never put a price on those who die in the service of their country. This legislation, however, is a step in the right direction. It is my hope that the House and Senate will take quick action to support the survivors of our fallen heroes.

Remembering State Representative Carol Beggs

On Monday, I joined the Salina community in mourning the loss of a husband, father, soldier, lawmaker and friend-Representative Carol Beggs. Carol had a long and distinguished record of public service, serving in the Navy in World War II, as mayor of Salina, and for ten years, as a representative in the Kansas House.

I enjoyed my time working with Carol in the state legislature and knew him to be a man of thoughtful action. He knew what he believed in, and he stood by his convictions. Though he faced tough decisions and took hard stances, Carol never lost his sense of humor. Even when disagreeing with fellow lawmakers, he knew how to lighten difficult moments and bring smiles back to colleagues' faces.

Carol Beggs passed away on January 19 after a long battle with pneumonia. I feel blessed to

have known Carol. He leaves behind a legacy of courage, honor, and service - and his life serves as an example to all of us. He will be missed.

Veterans Meeting Planned for Sabetha

On Friday, February 11, I will host a public forum in Sabetha, designed to give area veterans an opportunity to discuss the delivery of benefits and health care through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). My guest for the event will be Robert Malone, Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs Eastern Kansas Health Care System.

I hope this forum will provide veterans with an opportunity to discuss their needs and the challenges they face directly with those who are responsible for their care. Our country owes a tremendous debt to our veterans, and by hearing directly from them, we can do a better job of providing veterans with the highest quality of care possible.

The forum will be held on Friday, February 11, from 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at the Sabetha Middle School Auditorium, 751 Bluejay Boulevard.

I encourage all area veterans as well as other members of the public to attend this event.

Working to Secure Food Aid for Tsunami Victims

On December 26, 2004, South Asia was hit with a devastating tsunami that killed over 150,000. The survivors of this disaster have found themselves in need of essential items such as food, clean water, medical attention and shelter.

This week, I joined my colleagues in the House of Representatives in asking President Bush to increase food aid for the Department of Agriculture and the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust. This trust provides food supplies to victims of natural disasters. Food aid programs such as the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust must be replenished to meet both recent and ongoing food shortage catastrophes.

Currently, the USDA is facing food aid shortfalls due to pre-existing emergency assistance needs in Africa. I will continue to work with my colleagues and the President to see that

adequate food aid levels are available to cover the commitments of our country to these devastated areas of the world.

On the Road

Waterville

This week I visited Waterville and stopped by the local library, city hall, and school district offices. While in Waterville, I also visited the Weaver Hotel to see the renovation work that has been completed on this grand hotel. A few years ago, I was able to help secure a grant that covered roughly 80 percent of the remodeling costs for this landmark. The Weaver Hotel has the potential to be a wonderful attraction for this north central Kansas community.

Blue Rapids and Marysvill

On Monday, I toured the Georgia Pacific plant and Blue Rapids Railway. I visited with

Maintenance Superintendent Mike Minihan about the issues facing short line railroads. Currently, Kansas has over 2,000 miles of short line rail tracks that provide a critical link toward getting goods from our local communities to market. This is an important transportation component to our state. In 2004, legislation I introduced became law that provides a tax incentive for upgrading existing tracks to handle heavier rail cars. This is good news for short line rail operators and the shippers they serve.

After my visit to Blue Rapids, I spoke to about 50 bankers at the annual Marshall County Bankers Association meeting in Marysville. This allowed me the chance to update the bankers on the status of assistance for farmers and ranchers affected by the multiple years of drought and the process by which the new farm bill will be developed. The bankers were able to help provide me with a better understanding of the economic times our communities are facing and how I can better help with job creation and rural development.

Kansas City

On Friday, I was in Kansas City to speak to approximately 250 Kansans at the annual Kansas Contractors Association convention. I serve on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee in the House and provided a congressional update on the current highway bill. The meeting was a good opportunity for me to hear about what is working and what needs to be addressed in Washington, D.C. to streamline the construction process, so that Kansans get the most for their highway dollar. I will take the knowledge I gained back with me as we continue work on the highway bill, which is expected to be introduced as early as this week.

In the Office

This week, I met with Spc. Michael Diehl of Hays in my Washington, D.C. office. Michael is stationed in Washington, D.C. with the Army, serving as a guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. We are privileged to have someone from the First Congressional District serving our country in this high military honor. Also in the office for meetings were Mary Baskett, Executive Director, Kansas Head Start Association, Kay Mitchell, President, Kansas Head Start Association, Nonnie Trail, from Oakley and Korey Powell-Hensley, Director, Salina Head Start. The group was in the office to discuss the importance of funding for Head Start and to provide their perspective on the national reporting system for the program.

In for a tour of the U.S. Capitol this week was Terri Jones of Garden City and Dawn Rumford of Ottawa.

Very truly yours,

Jerry